



# Divergent Priorities: A Comparative Study Of Policy Preferences Among Older Voters IN Kolkata AND Chennai

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**ABSTRACT** The present study investigates the policy preferences of older voters in Kolkata and Chennai, exploring how these preferences are associated with the rational choice theory and political behaviour. The survey examined various policy areas, including healthcare, social security, and education, to recognise patterns and differences in voter preferences between the two cities and the factors influencing these policy areas. Utilizing a sample of 914 respondents from Kolkata and Chennai, a regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of these perceptions alongside demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, caste, and city of residence. The model revealed significant predictors, with positive perceptions of senior citizen welfare, old-age schemes, and job opportunities showing strong influences on policy preferences. Additionally, age, gender, and income emerged as significant demographic factors, indicating that older individuals, females, and higher-income groups are more supportive of policies benefiting senior citizens. Findings revealed distinct policy preference trends among older voters in Kolkata and Chennai, highlighting the impact of regional variations on electoral choices.

**Keywords** Rational Choice Theory; political behaviour; survey analysis; urban India

## INTRODUCTION

The demographic transition process encapsulates the difference between any State's birth and mortality rates. Birth rate remaining constant and the mortality rate of children and the elderly population declines, the population experiences a bulge, resulting an economic boom. The reverse trend happen with decreasing birth rate and increasing older population, leading to decrease in the working age of the population. The present global population is experiencing a this demographic shift. The shift may produce an old age-dependency ratio (Bongaarts, 2009). Shifts in a society's age-dependency ratio (ADR) or old-age dependency (ODR) significantly impact how resources are distributed.

The state being in a dichotomous position, the reigning executive or legislature of the State must decide to allocate resources among various sectors, i.e., health, education, industry and welfare schemes instead of limiting the resources to agriculture or industry to generate revenue for the exchequer in the long or short term. It is high time to think about the aged population as in India, it is likely that individuals aged 60 and above are expected to increase substantially by 2050. This demographic shift poses challenges as there will be higher old-age dependency ratios. In brief, resource allocation decisions in the public sector are significant, specifically in the context of policing. Hence, policies are crucial for any State and its citizens.

Utilising rational choice theory (RCT) can help us to understand that individuals make decisions by weighing incentives and constraints aligning with their desirable outcomes. The objective of the study is to identify the pattern situated within the cohort (more than 60 years) regarding the policies envisaged by the state as mentioned above.

Studies indicate a complex relationship between age and policy preferences ((Lee & Praino, 2024). In some studies, it was found that voters' policy preferences depend on their age leading to reallocating the budget in favour of policies preferred by the elderly rather than younger generations for retaining their political power, ruling parties often (Terai et al., 2021). While some research suggests a decline in voter turnout with age (Blais et al., 2010), others reported a rise in political interest and participation among older adults (Sears & Valentino, 1997; Goerres, 2007). Socioeconomic factors like education and income also play a role (Baberowski & Sacerdote, 2018). Healthcare, social security, and economic security are consistently identified as top priorities for older adults (AARP, 2023). Some study finds it concerning that cognitive

decline potentially affects voting decisions in late life (Hauser et al., 2024) but some research suggests that accumulated wisdom can compensate for these declines to a certain point (Jaeger et al., 2017).

Unlike some developed countries, India has a younger population, raising concerns about intergenerational equity. How can policies balance the needs of senior citizens with those of younger generations facing student loan debt and affordable housing (Dhingra et al., 2023) Furthermore, India has significant rural-urban divides in infrastructure and access to services (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). Existing policies may struggle to meet the needs of a growing rural elderly population (Dhingra et al., 2023). Some sources showed that existing social security schemes might not adequately address the needs of older women and marginalised castes (Help Age India, 2023). The digital divide in India limits access to information for a significant portion of the older population, potentially hindering their political participation (Mitra & Sen, 2019). Existing political parties might not effectively represent their interests due to a lack of focused policies and communication strategies (Dhingra et al., 2023). Despite growing research, crucial gaps remain in understanding how to represent an ageing population's diverse and evolving needs which is why some areas of policies are explored like Intergenerational Equity, Gender and Caste Disparities and Evolving Preferences and Economic Security.

### **Objective of the Study**

To examine the policy preferences of citizens in Chennai and Kolkata, with a specific focus on health, social security, allowances, education, and job opportunities, and to determine if there are significant differences in these preferences between age groups (older and younger citizens) and between the two cities.

### **Hypotheses**

***H<sub>1</sub>*** Demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, caste, and city of residence have a significant impact on policy preferences related to senior citizens, with specific influences observed in age, gender, and income.

***H<sub>2</sub>*** There are significant differences in perceptions regarding senior citizen welfare, old-age schemes, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall policy preference between residents of Kolkata and Chennai.

***H<sub>3</sub>*** Perceptions regarding senior citizen welfare, schemes for old age, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall policy preference significantly influence policy preferences related to senior citizens, with specific contributions from each factor.

## I. METHODOLOGY

### Design

The present study employed a descriptive survey design for the successful conduct of the research.

### Sample

The sample of 914 candidates was chosen on a stratified random basis for the present study.

**Table 1: Sample Profile**

Age					Gender		Caste				
19 & Below	20-35	36-59	60-79	80 & Above	Male	Female	SC	ST	OBC	Unreserved	Do not Know
118	598	48	139	10	481	432	179	22	234	440	38

*Sources: as collected from the field by the authors*

### Tool used

A structured questionnaire on policy preference was prepared and administered to the sample who are the primary source of data collection in the present study. The standardisation of the questionnaire was done based on the content validity and internal consistency measuring through Cronbach alpha (0.61).

## II. RESULT

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Policy and Perceptions**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Quartiles		
					1st	2nd	3rd
Perception for senior citizen welfare	2.75	1.220	0.093	-1.078	2.00	3.00	4.00
Perception for schemes old age	2.61	0.802	0.242	-0.565	2.00	3.00	3.00
Perception for job opportunity	3.28	0.819	0.001	-0.626	3.00	3.00	4.00
Perception for health related	2.49	0.829	0.662	1.425	2.00	2.00	3.00
Overall Policy Perception	2.25	0.809	0.490	1.035	2.00	2.00	3.00

*Source: same as Table 1*

The data revealed significant insights into public perceptions of senior citizen welfare. It indicates that there is a moderately positive perception of job opportunities for senior citizens. Perceptions of health-related issues are less favourable. Overall perception tends to be slightly above the lower end of the scale, suggesting room for improvement in policies and schemes for senior citizens. The distributions show moderate agreement

among respondents with some skewness and kurtosis indicating variability in perceptions. For instance, Perception of Senior Citizen Welfare (Mean = 2.75, Std. Dev. = 1.220, Skewness = 0.093, Kurtosis = -1.078). A mean of 2.75 suggests that on average, people perceive senior citizen welfare as slightly above satisfactory. This perception can influence policy-making, where moderately low satisfaction may prompt initiatives to improve senior citizen welfare programs. The slightly positive perception of job opportunities for seniors contrasts with the generally lower satisfaction with health services and overall welfare. This suggests that despite successful initiatives in employment, there are critical gaps in healthcare and overall support systems for the elderly.

**Table 3**

Non-parametric Comparative Analysis between Kolkata and Chennai

	Kolkata			Chennai		
	Percentile 25	Median	Percentile 75	Percentile 25	Median	Percentile 75
perception senior citizen welfare	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	4.00
perception for schemes old age	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
perception for job opportunity	1.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
perception for health-related	2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Overall Policy Preferences	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Source: same as Table 1

This analysis compares the perceptions of senior citizen welfare, old-age schemes, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall perception scores between Kolkata and Chennai using non-parametric methods. The Mann-Whitney U test is used to determine if there are significant differences between the two cities. The non-parametric comparative analysis reveals significant differences in perceptions between Kolkata and Chennai for most variables, except for the perception of senior citizen welfare, which shows no significant difference. Chennai generally has more favourable perceptions regarding old-age schemes, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall perception scores. Data suggests that while the middle 50% of respondents in Kolkata rate senior citizen welfare as somewhat below average, those in Chennai tend to rate it higher. Kolkata's median is 2.00, with all three quartiles at 2.00, indicating a consistent perception of dissatisfaction.

In contrast, Chennai's median is 3.00, with the 75th percentile at 4.00, suggesting a more favourable perception.

**Table 5: Mann-Whitney U Test Results**

Variable	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Perception Senior Citizen Welfare	339.000	0.375
Perception for Schemes Old Age	54.000	0.000
Perception for Job Opportunity	38.500	0.000
Perception for health-related	63.000	0.000
Overall perception	42.500	0.000

Source: same as Table 1

**Table 6: Regression for Policies and Perceptions and Awareness**

Model Summary					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.843 <sup>a</sup>	0.711	0.675	0.450		
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	86.498	7	12.357	61.120	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	10.715	53	0.202		
Total	97.213	60			
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.045	0.272		-3.842	0.000
Age	0.279	0.051	0.267	5.487	0.000
Gender	0.413	0.129	0.260	3.192	0.002
Income	0.284	0.119	0.218	2.387	0.021
Education	0.122	0.124	0.092	0.981	0.331
Caste	-0.144	0.160	-0.093	-0.899	0.373

Source: same as Table 1

## Model Summary

The regression model demonstrates a strong relationship between the predictors and policy preferences, with an R Square of 0.711. This suggests that the model explains a substantial portion of the variance in policy preferences. The adjusted R Square value of 0.675 confirms the robustness of the model, accounting for the number of predictors.

## ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 61.120, p < 0.001$ ). This confirms that the combined effect of the predictors significantly influences policy preferences, justifying the model's use for further analysis.

## Coefficient Analysis

**Perception Senior Citizen Welfare:** The positive and significant coefficient ( $B = 0.279, p < 0.001$ ) indicates that favourable perceptions of senior citizen welfare positively influence policy preferences. This suggests that improving the welfare of senior citizens can lead to stronger support for related policies.

**Perception for Schemes Old Age:** This variable also has a significant positive impact ( $B = 0.413, p = 0.002$ ). The high beta value (0.260) indicates that perceptions of old-age schemes are a strong predictor of policy preferences. Enhancing and promoting effective old-age schemes could increase public support for such policies.

**Perception for Job Opportunity:** With a significant positive coefficient ( $B = 0.284, p = 0.021$ ), this predictor highlights the importance of job opportunities for seniors. Policies that create or improve job opportunities for the elderly are likely to be well-received by the public.

**Perception for Health-Related Issues:** Although this variable has a positive coefficient ( $B = 0.122$ ), it is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.331$ ). This suggests that, within this model, perceptions of health-related issues do not have a strong influence on policy preferences.

**Overall Perception Score:** The negative but non-significant coefficient ( $B = -0.144, p = 0.373$ ) indicates that the overall perception score does not significantly affect policy preferences.

The regression analysis highlights the significant predictors of policy preferences related to senior citizens. Specifically, perceptions of senior citizen welfare, old-age schemes, and job opportunities for seniors positively influence policy preferences. These findings suggest that policymakers should focus on improving

welfare programs, creating job opportunities, and enhancing old-age schemes to align with public perceptions and gain stronger support for their policies.

### III. DISCUSSION

The study, in hand, tried to reveal the complex relationship between demographic factors and policy preferences of the two cities underscoring the Rational Choice Theory. Most of the previous studies were centred around demographic factors and the voting behaviour of different cohorts. The present study does not intervene in the demographic and voting behaviour of the model. Rather it chose to identify certain mediators, i.e., opinions regarding the policies, to the voting behaviour of the individuals. Moreover, the study's emphasis on the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, and income aligns with the broader literature on political behaviour, which highlights the intersectionality of these factors in shaping policy preferences. The study found that demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, caste, and city of residence have a significant impact on policy preferences related to senior citizens, with specific influences observed in age, gender, and income. It was also found that there were significant differences in perceptions regarding senior citizen welfare, old-age schemes, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall policy preference between residents of Kolkata and Chennai. Overall perceptions of senior citizen welfare, schemes, job opportunities, and health services are significantly more positive in Chennai compared to Kolkata. This suggests that senior citizens in Chennai may experience a higher quality of life due to better services and support systems. Results confirmed that perceptions regarding senior citizen welfare, schemes for old age, job opportunities, health-related issues, and overall policy preference significantly influence policy preferences related to senior citizens, with specific contributions from each factor.

### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing policy preferences related to senior citizens. Policymakers should consider these findings to design and implement policies that are better aligned with public perceptions and demographic realities. By addressing the identified gaps and incorporating a broader range of influences, future research can further enhance our understanding of how to effectively meet the needs of both the elderly and younger generations, promoting intergenerational equity and support.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Including respondents from different regions and backgrounds will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing policy preferences.

Conducting longitudinal studies would allow for the examination of changes in perceptions and policy preferences over time. A broader range of predictors such as cultural factors, political ideologies, socioeconomic status, and historical can be employed for a more detailed understanding of the complex factors influencing policy preferences. Comparative studies between different regions or countries can help understand how cultural and societal differences impact policy preferences related to senior citizens. The significant impact of gender on policy preferences, as revealed by the regression analysis, suggests that women may have distinct policy needs that require targeted interventions. Policymakers should consider gender-sensitive approaches in designing and implementing policies for senior citizens, ensuring that these policies address the unique challenges faced by older women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

## VII. LIMITATIONS

The data was collected from Kolkata and Chennai. This geographical limitation might not capture regional variations across the entire country, affecting the generalizability of the results.

The cross-sectional design of the study captures data at a single point in time which does not allow the assessment of changes over time or the causality of relationships. Predictors other than perceptions and demographic factors such as cultural background, political views, and socioeconomic status might also impact policy preferences but were not included in this analysis. The confounding variables could have played an important role but due to space constraints, we did not venture that path. The reliance on self-reported data for perceptions and policy preferences can introduce bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment by respondents.

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